When Are We All Finally Going to Stop Living in Fear?

JESSICA WILDFIRE

Grandfailure

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Back in the 1950s, this psychology professor at Swarthmore had an idea. He wondered just how powerful peer pressure was.

So he rounded up 123 students.

They were all dudes.

He put them in groups of five or seven. He told one dude in every group he was conducting vision tests. He told the rest of the group he was really studying peer pressure. He told them all to give the right answer the first two times. After that, they were supposed to give the same wrong answer for almost every question. The wrong answer wasn't just a little wrong.

It was obviously wrong.

Epically wrong.

The professor expected the one dude to hold his ground most of the time, that he wouldn't conform. The professor was wrong. Only about 25 percent of his test subjects resisted the urge to conform. About a third of them conformed almost all of the time, and 5 percent conformed completely.

The professor's name was Solomon Asch. His studies became known as the Asch Conformity Experiments. They demonstrated something disturbing about human nature, something that's been verified in history. You can expect about 40 percent of any population to go along with something that's obviously wrong. They'll do it simply because they want to fit in.

You know what I call that?

I call it living in fear.

It was a rough start to the year. My kid's school tried to move her into a building without air purifiers or ventilation. In the other building, they had one air purifier pushed up against the wall, facing backward.

I mean, at least it was *turned on*.

I wasn't sure what to do. Then I realized something.

I was living in fear.

Part of my brain still wondered what these teachers really thought about me. Maybe they talked about me behind my back. Maybe they made fun of me. Maybe they were just being polite when they expressed their gratitude. Maybe they wrote me off as just another eccentric parent.

So I made a change.

I decided to stop living in fear.

The next morning, I hauled over an extra big air purifier. I gave my stance to the head of the school. I took my candor up a notch. I reminded them about the CDC's guidelines for indoor air quality. I told them flat out, they weren't going to put my daughter in a building without air purifiers. I told them it wasn't going to happen again. My kid spends most of the day outside. When she's inside, she's going to get five air changes per hour, minimum.

And she's going to wear a mask.

My school will never fully embrace clean air unless I keep bringing it up. I have to risk making people around me uncomfortable.

I have to risk feeling uncomfortable.

That's how change happens.

I have to be strategic. I can't voice my unfiltered opinion all the time. Things won't always be perfect. People won't always do what they should, but I have to keep trying. It's a process.

Now I understand what to do. I can't just donate air purifiers. I have to check up on them

every week. I have to make sure they're turned on and facing the right direction. I have to change the filters for them. I have to clean the prefilters. I have to decline their offer to do it.

I have to do it myself.

They won't.

I can't afford to be deferential about it. I can't worry about it looking weird or awkward. If I keep doing it, then it will become normal.

It's already starting to happen.

They don't have a problem with me checking on every single air purifier to make sure it's being used properly. I know that if I don't do it, then it won't happen. There's nothing weird about it. There's only something weird about it if I act like it's an unusual or temporary thing. It's not.

This is the right answer.

This is normal now.

Eventually, they would learn to do this themselves. How many sick kids would it take? How many times would my daughter get Covid? I can't take that chance. She deserves better than that. She deserves a parent who's going to go in there and verify with their own eyes that she's safe.

I'm not living in fear of Covid.

That's how everyone thinks about maskers and clean air advocates. The media calls us holdouts. They tell everyone we have anxiety. We hear it every day. The news says the rest of the world is moving on.

Well, not really.

The rest of the world is only moving into another wave of Covid. They're only moving into disability and slow death.

There's a recipe to all this.

When you wear a mask, you're not living in fear of Covid. When you clean the air, you're not living in fear of Covid. When you choose to eat outside, you're not living in fear of Covid. You're living *with* Covid.

My family goes to parks. We go to outdoor birthday parties. We play outside. We go to museums. Those museums have upgraded their clean air facilities. We wear masks inside. It's not a big deal.

Earlier this summer, we threw a birthday party for my kid. We spent some time indoors. I insisted on bringing multiple air purifiers. We could only fit one in the car. So we bought another one when we got into town. We gave it to my in-laws and told them to keep it for next time. We kept them running 24/7. Maybe it looked weird at first. I didn't care.

It was the right answer.

Look at the ones who won't do any of this:

They're a living example of the Asch conformity experiments.

Most of them are getting sick all the time. They can't think straight. They can't do their jobs. They can barely drive. They're watching their friends drop dead from strokes, heart attacks, and aneurysms. They lie to themselves and each other. They act like the summer flu is a thing now.

It was never a thing.

They live in fear.

They're scared of the right answer.

Here's why people won't wear a mask unless the government tells them: They're scared someone will make fun of them.

That's it.

They're scared of looking strange. They're scared of getting weird looks. They're scared they won't fit in anymore.

The ones who are *really* scared don't want to admit their urgent desire to feel normal and be accepted. So they make excuses. You can show them 50 sources, and they'll tell you it's not enough.

They won't even look at them.

That's fear.

The biggest critics of masks and clean air engage in dominance displays. That's what people do when they're scared. They try to banish their fear by overperforming confidence.

They believe elevating their status will save them.

Power gives them a sense of safety.

It's a hollow feeling.

They live in fear of their emotions. They live in fear of each other. They're so scared, they don't even want to talk about Covid. Either that, or they go around all the time telling everyone else to stop living in fear. They want to treat Covid like a bad dream they woke up from.

It's not.

It's real, and it's here.

Nobody ever deals with their fear by ignoring it or hiding from it. Nobody ever deals with their fear by pretending to be brave. You have to face your fears. You have to deal with them. That's the point of practically every single story ever told. Don't let your fears control you.

Conforming isn't brave.

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Maia Nilsson

Former tech marketer, retired to educate myself · Yesterday

💯 Same deal with climate.

I think you're 🎯. But how many fronts can we fight continually as exhaustible human beings? It's hard not to see people becoming so worn down they succumb to conformity by exhaustion.

♡ 1

LD

Lynn D.

Yesterday

Pitch perfect, Jessica.

You handled the situation masterfully and I'm certain your approach has been noted by the personnel who work in the building.

You're putting your own efforts into making things safer. And you're raising awareness.

Parents worry about how they're perceived by teachers, but not more than teachers worry about how they're seen by parents. I'm a retired teacher. I've been in the trenches. We want parents as allies, not adversaries!

Most teachers love kids and love their job. A major part of it is making school and their class a safe environment.

I don't get why it's deteriorated to this point. But I truly believe your example is powerful and it certainly will help raise awareness.

Yeah, they'll talk about it. Some might be stubbornly resistant. But it's such an easy thing for them to incorporate into their classrooms. Easier than me donning rubber gloves and washing down the tables between classes during flu season.

I'm really impressed by your initiative.

♡ 1

SB

Sophia Bourne

Worrier extraordinaire. · Yesterday

“They believe elevating their status will save them.” I work for some very wealthy people who travel and cavort. One recently got COVID for what seems the third time. They seem to just pass it off. They don’t discuss how strange things have become. They seem entirely unconcerned. Life still an adventure for them. All going as if

♡ 0

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DV

Damion Valentine

Sr. Sentinel Intelligence Officer · 3 hours ago

This is the way now. I've been doing this since 2020. I had the benefit of being a designer of systems so not ever trusting human competence, I designed systems for every place my loved ones worked, lived and would have to go to. Schools, doctors, salons. You name it. It's exhausting and expensive both financially and emotionally but this is the world weak nihilists and deniers have created for us. It's how we have to live until enough people die/disabled or some treatments/vaccines/cures are made that actually work and last. This is the way.

♡ 0

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